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Testimony of Bruce P. Cameron

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on behalf of

Americans for Democratic Action

before the

House Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, my name is Bruce P. Cameron. I am a legislative Representative concerned with Foreign Affairs for Americans for Democratic Action.

First Mr. Chairman, I would like to congratulate you for holding this hearing on the famine in East Timor. Along with my associates I have given careful attention to the mounting crisis in that territory, and I would like to take this opportunity to present some of our findings. In particular, I would like to pinpoint certain needs which apparently have not been adequately met by the current relief operations. I believe that there has been a tendency within the concerned bureaucracies to describe the present catastrophe in terms which are altogether too optimistic. It is my belief that if the relief program is not expanded quickly, with adequate monitoring provisions, then the already horrifying death toll will continue to climb. In this context, it is important to note that the International Red Cross has reported problems in raising the amount of money it needs to conduct its operations. International Red Cross officials in New York report that the Red Cross has only been able to raise roughly one-half of its $13 million projected budget.

The focus of this hearing is the immediate problems in East Timor and their possible remedies. The purpose is not to investigate the political factors which explain the causes of the present crisis. But, how we view the origin of this crisis has an important bearing on the steps we take to find a solution. In our view it is absolutely incorrect to blame the current situation in East Timor on Portuguese colonial neglect. The famine is the direct result of a war of annexation carried out by the Indonesian government. Conditions in East Timor under the Portuguese certainly were not good.

However, before the December 1975 Indonesian invasion, the food situation was adequate, although there was periodic localized hunger. Independent observers, including the International Red Cross, who visited the territory after the August-September 1975 civil war noted that food production had returned to normal by December 1975. Disease also existed, but certainly neither in the epidemic proportions nor the severity now prevailing.

To accept the fallacious argument that the present crisis to a substantial degree is due to the legacy of centuries of slash and burn agriculture would be to acquiesce to the proposition that the East Timorese currently displaced by the war cannot return to their former homes. It would be wrong for U.S. policymakers to accept that proposition.

It must be acknowledged that throughout its efforts to annex East Timor, Indonesia has received the unstinting military and diplomatic support of the United States. As a result, our government and the American people bear a responsibility for the suffering of the East Timorese people and everything must be done to insure that as many lives as possible are saved.

The magnitude of the suffering in East Timor is shocking. On November 2, the Indonesian Foreign Minister stated that conditions in East Timor may be worse than Biafra or Kampuchea. This past spring an International Red Cross delegation visited thirteen villages or refugee camps in East Timor which had a combined population of 75,000 prople. The delegation reported that 60,000 of these people were "in a state of alarming malnutrition, among them some 20,000 dying of hunger..." American official who visited East Timor in September reported that "up to 400,000 to some degree" were

affected by famine and disease, with an estimated 200,000 most seriously affected. A report on this visit sent to Washington by our embassy in Jakarta stated that the people are in uniformly bad shape, including not only children but also adults. In all of the villages visited, it was uncommon not to see a child or adult in an advanced stage of malnutrition.

Journalists who visited East Timor at the end of October reported a staggering daily death toll. Peter Rodgers reported to Australia from one village:

> Antoni and his 8,000 or so fellow-villagers in Hatolia...are hungry, diseased and deprived. But they are also lucky. They are among the first East Timorese to receive food and medical care under a joint relief operation...For hundreds and probably thousands of other East Timorese the Red Cross operation, as well as a massive food distribution programme by the US-based Catholic Relief Services has come too late. They are either dead or so weakened by malnutrition and disease that death is inevitable.

I would like to submit to the committee these two photographs taken by Mr. Peter Rodgers, an Australian journalist with the Sydney Morning Herald.

I would like to note in passing that the committee must at some point discover how the famine in East Timor could have advanced so far without any significant relief operations. In particular, there were very disturbing reports which came out in September 1978 in the course of a visit to East Timor by ambassadors, including the U.S. Ambassador, and journalists. Why were there no significant diplomatic efforts at that time to open up East Timor to international aid?

At this point I would like to focus upon four related aspects of the relief situation: The distribution of food aid, medical problems,

transportation difficulties and the ability of the East Timorese people to once again become self-sustaining.

The current relief operations are providing large quantities of food aid to the people of East Timor. I am sure that those witnesses scheduled to follow me will describe this effort in greater detail, so I will limit my remarks to a few brief observations.

In our inquiries with the State Department, USAID and Catholic Relief Services, we have received optimistic accounts of the food distribution program. Food stocks are reportedly adequate not only for current needs, but also for the rainy season that is just beginning and which will last through March. However, the journalists who visited East Timor only a month ago reported that conditions were still desperate in many areas, and reinforced the impression that a more extensive relief effort is needed. Peter Rodgers clearly indicates in his dispatches that as of the beginning of the month some areas lacked aid:

> Although an Indonesian Red Cross doctor said that as many as nine people a day were dying from starvation in the area around Hatolia, relief officials agreed that the worst problems are in the eastern part of the territory, where the Red Cross program is yet to get under way and where the Catholic Relief Service effort has not yet had much impact.

Paul Zach's November 15 Washington Post article stated the following, after reporting an optimistic U.S. Embassy assessment of the situation:

> Other officials in East Timor said they fear only the fringe areas of suffering have been reached so far and that heavy rains expected in December could cut off supplies and lead to more deaths.

Catholic Relief Services has so far stated that its efforts have been focused upon an estimated 240,000 prople, while ICRC is reportedly

attempting to feed 60,000, a total of 300,000 people in the two programs. USAID reports that 400,000 people are in need of assistance. It is important to know if food is reaching the other 100,000 people.

Beyond this question, there remains the fundamental issue of the monitoring of food distribution. During the past four years there have been perisitent, troubling reports that what little foreign relief assistance has reached East Timor and which was administered by the Indonesian Red Cross has been looted by Indonesian military authorities and even Indonesian Red Cross officials, at times in significant quantities. We must be sure that U.S. relief aid is actually reaching the East Timorese. The International Red Cross has a small foreign staff in Timor, all but one of whom are medical personnel. Catholic Relief Services has a staff composed entirely of Indonesians and East Timorese to distribute the food aid with only one foreign official regularly there to oversee the operation. Such people are susceptible to the pressures of local authorities and are in no position to counter periodic or systematic corruption.

The State Department has recently been making assurances that corruption problems have been eradicated, but the best guarantee that food aid will reach its intended recipients is greatly expanded monitoring by outside observers. A mere handful of foreigners, no matter how diligently they work, are in no position to supervise the distribution of aid to 150 villages and camps spread over an area the size of Connecticut. If the present relief efforts are augmented with more personnel and if other relief organizations are allowed into East Timor to provide expanded

operations in nutrition and medicine, then there would be the foreign presence to deter and monitor possible corruption.

On the basis of our research it seems clear that the war has caused overwhelming medical problems in East Timor. After U.S. officials visited the territory in September it was reported that the majority of the children are marasmic. All age groups were said to be devastated by malaria, parasites, upper respiratory infections and skin ulcerations. Recent newspaper reports state that in villages visited by journalists, 80% of the people are infected with malaria.

It seems that there are less than twenty doctors in the countryside now yet hundreds of thousands of people are ill, the majority of them seriously. Only immediate emergency medical care will restore many of these people to relatively sound health, although many of the surviving dhildren may have already suffered irremediable brain damage. The Indonesian government is in no position to provide the doctors, nurses, medicine and equipment needed to combat this health catastrophe. Health care is already too limited in Indonesia to draw off more doctors to East Timor. However, the West is able to provide this assistance. When we recall the role played by U.S. armaments in East Timor, it is not only appropriate but of great moral urgency that the United States government help facilitate the entry of more doctors, nurses and other public health personnel.

It is sobering to recall that there were more ICRC foreign medical personnel in East Timor during the three months preceding the invasion than there are today.

East Timor's transportation limitations pose a serious obstacle to a comprehensive and adequate relief effort. Beyond the towns the road network is unpaved. The rainy season will soon make many of these roads impassable. The International Red Cross has been using helicopters to reach many isolated areas, but these must be leased from the Indonesian government and are very expensive. Already, more than $1.2 million of the $7.7 million raised by the International Red Cross has been allocated to chartering helicopters. The Red Cross delegate in East Timor, Cedric Neukomm, was quoted in the Washington Post as saying that his organization needs an additional $4 million to charter ships and to increase the operating hours of the helicopters. The United States and private relief organizations could make a significant contribution to the relief operations by supplying the necessary funds.

There are many significant problems that need to be surmounted if the survivors in East Timor are to be able to become self-sustaining again. The present relief operations are said to have attempted to distribute quantities of seed, and the State Department and USAID both report that 300,000 people in refugee camps will receive land and farming implements from the Indonesian government. As of now there is no indication that these supplies have been forthcoming in time for the pre-monsoon planting. We do not even know if the Indonesian authorities have relaxed previous security measures so that people are allowed out of the "resettlement villages."

After the USAID mission visited Timor in September of this year, it was reported that the Indonesian government had overestimated the productivity of the relocated persons. It is not realistic to expect that the victims of a famine, the vast majority of the surviving population, will be able to tend to fields while trying to recover from serious malnutrition, malaria and a host of other ailments. As the members of this committee and USAID probably know, even in a tropical climate there is more to agriculture than simply planting seeds. One strongly doubts that the next harvest will end the need for large-scale relief assistance. The administration should be making plans now on the assumption that food and other relief aid will be needed in considerable quantities after the monsoon season ends.

There are additional issues related to Indonesian policy in East Timor which should be considered during this hearing. One concerns Indonesia's resettlement policy. Most of the 400,000 people in need of outside assistance are people who lived in the territory's mountains until recently. During the past year they have come down from their traditional homes in some cases to seek food and medicine, but also to escape Indonesian military operations. They have been gathered into an estimated 150 so-called "resettlement villages," where owing to neglect, their condition has worsened considerably. According to many reports they will not be allowed to return to the mountains. This was confirmed by the report prepared by the U.S. Embassy after the September visit to East Timor:

It is difficult to distinguish hwo many people have been moved into the resettlement villages by the GOI (Government of Indonesia) and how many of them have come into them on their own. The point is that the people are now in these villages and the GOI plans for them to remain there.

USAID and the State Department seem to be attempting to justify this policy by claiming that the mountains will no longer support traditional agricultural practices; too many years of slash and burn agriculture have drained the earth of its productive potential. As Congressman Harkin has pointed out, this is a tendentious assertion. The slash and burn argument masks the real American justification for the "resettlement" program: It is simply Indonesian government policy.

The only long term solution to the present famine is for those in the resettlement camps. who have been restored to health to be permitted to return to their former homes or similar terrain in the mountain regions. Certainly it seems doubtful that there is enough arable land within walking distance of the approximately 300,000 people now in refugee camps. It should be U.S. policy to encourage the Indonesian government to allow people to return to those areas where farming can be resumed.

Recent reports in the Jakarta press have raised other serious questions about Indonesian agriculture policies in East Timor. One is that agricultural palntations will be developed adjacent to the resettlement camps. Does this signal a policy which will reduce a proud and independent people to contract laboreres on coffee, clove and livestock plantations?

The Jakarta press has also reported that an Indonesian company has monopolized the coffee market in East Timor and is enforcing an artificially low price for the territory's gourmet-quality coffee beans.

Before concluding, I would like to raise two other issues which are relevant to my discussion of the humanitarian situation in East Timor. The first concerns serious allegations of continuing human rights violations. During the last year, there have been many reports of disappearances--some reports originating from Indonesian church sources. The disappeared include people who support independence and surrendered FRETILIN soldiers. There have also been reports of the summary execution of FRETILIN soldiers and in some cases even the families of FRETILIN members, children included. Similarly, there are reports that there are political detainees being held in 40 different prisons.

The precise validity of these reports is hard to ascertain since Indonesia has sealed off East Timor from the scrutiny of the international community. In order to investigate these reports, and even more importantly, to provide a deterrent to their recurrence, the United States should encourage Indonesia with all the means at our disposal to allow unrestricted access to East Timor. This would include all manner of journalists as well as respected international human rights organizations. This is not a small or frivolous point. In the past the Indonesian government has shown that it responds to international pressure on the issue of political prisoners and perhaps has been more wary about the degree and scope of further human rights abuses.

Again I would reiterate that the United States government, because of its military relations with the Indonesian government, bears a special responsibility in this regard.

There have also been reports that people who would like to leave East Timor have not been allowed to do so. In late 1976, more than three years ago, a much heralded family reunion program was announced by Indonesia and Australia. It was set up to bring out of East Timor the relatives of refugees in Australia. To date, only 300 people have been allowed to leave. Another 2,000 have been designated by the East Timorese community in Australia.

Those who have succeeded in leaving are primarily ethnic Chinese not ethnic East Timorese. On November 22, 1979 the Canberra Times reported that East Timorese in Australia have paid A$4,000 (Australian dollars) per person in bribes to Indonesian officials to facilitate departures.

In addition, the Indonesian government now requires East Timorese civil servants and others to exchange their Portuguese citizenship for Indonesian citizenship. If they refuse, they reportedly lose their jobs. Letters from the island support this report and also assert that those who refuse to renounce their Portuguese nationality face other forms of discrimination.

Both the question of family reunions and reprisals against those who will not renounce their Portuguese nationality are those kinds of problems which I believe could be ameliorated if the international commuintiy had greater access to the island.

Finally Mr. Chairman, let me again congratulate you for holding this hearing and for all your efforts to gain greater visibility for the tragedy of East Timor. I hope that your continued efforts joined by the others on this committee will garner for the people of East Timor even more assistance from our government and other governments.

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